



**COME
TOGETHER,
CANADA.**

**Stronger connections,
better mental health.**



YOUTH AND SOCIAL CONNECTION

About a million young people in Canada say they're often or always lonely. So, what's going on and what does it mean for their mental health?

HOW ARE YOUNG PEOPLE DOING?

- Youth mental health in Canada has been declining.ⁱ
- Mood and anxiety disorders are on the rise among youth.ⁱⁱ
- Girls and transgender youth report consistently worse mental health outcomes than their peers.ⁱⁱⁱ
- Between 66% and 75% of mental health issues first appear before the age of 24.^{iv}
- In Canada, youth 16-24 think about suicide more often than any other age group.^v

LONELINESS IN YOUTH

Youth are the loneliest of all age groups in Canada.^{vi}

- 1 in 5 youth ages 15–24 feel lonely often or always.
- Girls report frequent loneliness more often than boys.
- Transgender and gender-diverse youth report the highest levels of loneliness.

- Young Canadians (ages 16-24) report less positive social relationships and less social support than all other age groups.

WHY LONELINESS MATTERS

- Feeling lonely can have a huge impact on young people's lives.^{vii}

When youth feel lonely, they are more likely to:

- Struggle with their mental health.
- Have trouble sleeping or feel tired all the time.
- Find it harder to focus or stay motivated at school.
- Take more risks, like using substances.
- Pull away from friends, family, and activities they used to enjoy.
- Have more physical symptoms, like headaches or stomach aches.

WHY CONNECTION MATTERS

Feeling connected to others is one of the most important ways to protect young people's mental health.^{viii}

When young people feel connected:

- They feel they belong and are accepted.
- They build confidence, resilience, and cope better.
- They report lower anxiety and depression and fewer thoughts of suicide.
- They are less likely to engage in risky behaviours, like substance use, violence, and other health risks.^{ix}

YOUTH CONNECTION IN A DIGITAL WORLD

Nearly all Canadian youth are online and using social media. But being digitally connected doesn't mean they feel connected to each other.

- 99% of Canadian youth (15–24) use the Internet.
- About 4 in 10 Canadian youth exceed recommended screen time guidelines which is linked to negative impacts on their mental health and well-being.^x
- People who rely only on virtual communication report lower relationship satisfaction and higher loneliness.^{xi}
- Social isolation can make youth more vulnerable to harmful online influences, including extremism.^{xii}

SOCIAL MEDIA AND YOUTH CONNECTION

Social media plays a big role in how young people connect. It can support friendships and social ties. But how they use it matters.

- 91% of youth use social media.^{xiii}
- Youth report the longest screen time and highest social media use of any age group.^{xiv}
- Up to 21% of youth say social media use interferes with sleep, relationships, or mental health.^{xv}
- Heavy use of social media use in youth is linked with poorer mental health and lower life satisfaction,^{xvi} and specifically with:
 - Symptoms of anxiety and depression
 - Increased thoughts of suicide
 - Poor sleep
 - Reduced overall well-being
 - Increased loneliness

AI CHATBOTS AND CONNECTION

Artificial intelligence is changing how young people seek support and connection. More youth are turning to AI chatbots, especially when they feel lonely or isolated.^{xvii}

- Chatbots may provide some short-term relief from loneliness, but they don't – and can't – replace real relationships.^{xviii}
- Over-reliance on AI for support is linked to greater isolation over time and reduced real-world connections.^{xix}

HOW YOUTH CAN ADDRESS THEIR LONELINESS

- Make time for real-life connection.
- Get involved in something live and in person. Join a club, team, or activity with your friends or to meet new people.
- Don't just message. Make plans. Hang out instead of staying online.
- Take breaks from screens.
- Notice how you feel. Too much scrolling can make loneliness worse.
- Reach out if you're feeling lonely. Talk to someone you trust.
- If you can't shake the loneliness, it's okay to ask for support.

ADULTS CAN HELP YOUNG PEOPLE FEEL LESS ALONE

- Put devices down during meals, activities, and time with friends and family.
- Encourage real world activities.
- Set healthy boundaries around screen use, especially around bedtime and during time together.
- Be an adult role model: how are you using screens yourself?
- Notice signs of isolation. Stay connected and be there for them.

i Public Health Agency of Canada. 2025. *The Health of Young People in Canada: Focus on Mental Health*. Ottawa: Government of Canada. <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/science-research-data/young-people-canada-focus-mental-health.html>

ii Odega AS, Ugwuanyi J, Dieba R, Fasoro OS, Adepeko OM, Ofuase-Lasekan IH, Okobi OE. Sociodemographic Patterns in Mood and Anxiety Disorders Among Youth and Young Adults in Canada: An Analysis of the 2015-2021 Surveillance Data. *Cureus*. 2025 Sep 13;17(9).

iii Public Health Agency of Canada, 2025.

iv Solmi M, Radua J, Olivola M, Croce E, Soardo L, Salazar de Pablo G, Il Shin J, Kirkbride JB, Jones P, Kim JH, Kim JY, Carvalho AF, Seeman MV, Correll CU, Fusar-Poli P. Age at onset of mental disorders worldwide: large-scale meta-analysis of 192 epidemiological studies. *Mol Psychiatry*. 2022 Jan;27(1):281-295.

v Mental Health Research Canada. 2024. *Social relationships and youth mental health*. <https://www.mhrc.ca/social-relationships-on-youth>

vi Statistics Canada. 2024. *Canadian Social Survey: Loneliness in Canada*. The Daily, February 14, 2024. Ottawa: Statistics Canada; Mental Health Research Canada, 2024. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/211124/dq211124e-eng.htm>

vii Public Health Agency of Canada. 2022. *Social media use and connections and relationships among Canadian adolescents*. Ottawa: Government of Canada; World Health Organization 2020. Adolescent Mental Health. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/adolescent-mental-health>

viii Public Health Agency of Canada. 2022; MHRC 2024; Blum RW, Lai J, Martinez M, Jessee C. Adolescent connectedness: cornerstone for health and wellbeing. *BMJ*. 2022 Oct 27.

ix Statistics Canada. 2024. *Young people and exposure to harmful online content in 2022*. Ottawa: Government of Canada. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-627-m/11-627-m2024005-eng.htm>

x Statistics Canada. 2026. Does screen time make a difference? A longitudinal study of youth screen time and well-being. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75-006-x/2026001/article/00003-eng.htm>

xi Statistics Canada. 2025. Disconnect to reconnect? How technology is shaping the way Canadians connect with friends. The Daily, October 24, 2025. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/251024/dq251024a-eng.htm>

xii Statistics Canada. 2024. Young people and exposure to harmful online content in 2022: Canadian Medical Association. 2024. *How does loneliness fuel misinformation?* <https://www.cma.ca/healthcare-for-real/how-does-loneliness-fuel-misinformation>

xiii Statistics Canada, 2024.

xiv MHRC, 2025.

xv Public Health Agency of Canada, 2025.

xvi Public Health Agency of Canada, 2018; Public Health Agency of Canada, 2025; Statistics Canada. 2023. *Online digital media use and adolescent mental health*.

xvii Common Sense Media. 2025. *Talk, Trust, and Trade-Offs: How and Why Teens Use AI Companions*. San Francisco, CA: Common Sense Media. <https://www.common Sense Media.org/research/talk-trust-and-trade-offs-how-and-why-teens-use-ai-companions>

xviii Blum et al. 2022.

xix Briggs, Sara. "How AI Chatbots Are Affecting Teen Mental Health." *Psychology Today*, May 2024. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/learning-play/202405/how-ai-chatbots-are-affecting-teen-mental-health>